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Letter dated 18 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that the Government of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay has decided to submit its candidature for membership of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Uruguay is a State party to all international instruments relating to human rights and international refugee law: it has ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and has also adopted the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, the 1994 San José Declaration on Refugees and Displaced Persons, and the 2004 Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America.

Furthermore, Uruguay is a party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which provide the international legal basis for addressing the causes and consequences of statelessness.

At the national level, Act No. 18,076 of 19 December 2006 (Refugee Status) recognizes the human right to asylum and grants all persons the right to request and be afforded safe haven in the national territory as a means of safeguarding their life, physical, mental and intellectual integrity, freedom and security. The regulations for the implementation of this Act are currently being developed.

According to national law and in strict conformity with the universal standards of refugee protection, the Uruguayan procedure for recognizing refugee status is inspired by the principles of non-discrimination, non-rejection at frontiers, no direct or indirect refoulement to a country where the person's life, physical, mental and intellectual integrity, freedom or security are endangered, non-penalization of illegal entry into the country, most favourable interpretation and treatment, and confidentiality.

* E/2014/1/Rev.1, annex II.

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In Uruguay, until their applications have been decided, all applicants for refugee status have the right to a provisional identity document similar to the identity document of the country's inhabitants, which enables them to exercise the same rights as a national or legal citizen and to have equal access to basic public services such as health care and education. With the implementation of Act No. 18,076, Uruguay has demonstrated its commitment to international refugee law and its complete openness to receiving applicants for refugee status.

To date, nearly 200 refugees have found protection and a safe haven in Uruguay, where they can live full lives as human beings, on an equal footing with nationals. In short, they are in a place where their fundamental human rights are respected and recognized.

Moreover, the Uruguayan State has benefited from the contributions made by refugees, who have enriched Uruguayan society with their life experiences and cultural heritage. They have also contributed to the development of a culture of peace, respect and plurality and the strengthening of intercultural dialogue.

At the institutional level, the Refugee Commission of Uruguay (CORE) is responsible for deciding applications for refugee status. This Commission comprises a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a representative of the National Migration Office, a representative of the University of the Republic, a representative of the legislature, a representative of a non-profit non-governmental organization with relevant expertise, designated by the regional or national representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (in the case of Uruguay, the Ecumenical Service for Human Dignity), a representative of a non-profit non-governmental organization with aims and practices focused on human rights, designated by Asociación Nacional de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales Orientadas al Desarrollo (the national association of development-oriented non-governmental organizations) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or his representative (an invited member with the right to speak).

The Refugee Commission is a collegial body in which members from civil society, academia and Parliament are more numerous than representatives of the State. This ensures that the Commission is inclusive, transparent and democratic. Transparency is reflected in the composition of the Refugee Commission's technical secretariat: a tripartite entity comprising the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and the UNHCR implementing agency in Uruguay (Ecumenical Service for Human Dignity).

In addition, and as a further sign of its commitment to the promotion and protection of refugee rights, it should be noted that Uruguay is one of 25 countries in the world that have put in place a resettlement programme. A framework agreement on the resettlement of refugees with UNHCR was adopted by means of Act No. 18,382. Thus, Uruguay, supported by UNHCR, agrees that the purpose of resettlement is to address the special needs of refugees whose lives, security, freedom or other fundamental human rights are threatened in the country where they sought refuge. The objective of the refugee resettlement programme is to facilitate the rapid integration of refugees into Uruguayan society on a basis of self-sufficiency and their positive contribution to local society.

In light of the above, and given the need for the region to be equitably represented on the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, I should be grateful if you would submit this request for consideration by the Economic and Social Council.

(*Signed*) Gonzalo **Koncke**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative